

EASO Third Roundtable on Obesity

Leopold Hotel, Brussels, 6 April, 2016

Moderator: John Bowis, Former MEP and Former UK Minister of Health

Speakers:

- **Dr Maria Jose Vidal-Ragout**, Head of Unit, Non-Communicable Diseases and the Challenges of Healthy Ageing, Directorate for Health, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation:
The Commission's Approach to Tackling Obesity.
- **Michele Cecchini**, OECD:
Obesity: an Economic and Social Challenge.
- **John Halloran**, CEO, European Social Network:
The Social Dimensions of Obesity.
- **Dr Günter Danner**, Deputy Director, Permanent Representation of the German Social Security to the EU:
Meeting the Cost of Obesity.
- **Mischa van Eimeren**, EU Liaison Officer, European Association for the Study of Diabetes
Leveraging Action through Collaboration.

Executive summary

The European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO) hosted the third in a series of roundtable discussions on obesity on 6 April 2016. This was a follow-up to two other successful roundtables held in Brussels on 13 October 2015 and 13 January 2016.



Almost 30 stakeholders took part in the discussion, including medical professionals, patients, representatives from the European Commission, the OECD, an insurance representative, the European Social Network, Members from the European Parliament (MEPs), and some of the leading European organisations involved in the many illnesses for which obesity is a gateway disease.

Most participants agreed that obesity should be defined as a disease. The impact of the recognition of obesity as a disease on treatment and research was also discussed.

In the consideration of the economic and social cost of obesity, there was consensus that an increase in education and health promotion on all levels of the socio-economic scale was needed.

The roundtable event was enabled with support from Medtronic and Novo Nordisk.

Key points from the speakers



John Bowis introduced his background as both a patient and a former MEP.

He talked about the need of all countries in the EU to tackle the problem, in order for obesity to be taken seriously as a disease that receives sustained support.



Dr Alfred Sant, MEP, said that it was shocking how obesity affects everyone throughout generations and geographically and that it was time to adapt economic, financial and health policies to this ever growing problem.

The Maltese Council presidency will focus on childhood obesity as one of its health objectives. The key was to increase the dialogue around the issue and to bring it to the foreground in order to combine the policy and social dimensions at EU and national level.



Dr Maria Jose Vidal-Ragout said that obesity is a long-standing priority for the Commission. It recognises the need for a multi-sectoral approach due to the complexity of the disease and the fact that it is a gateway to many other diseases. The Commission has made more than €450 million available for obesity research under the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP7).

She also gave an overview of different running projects that support research on obesity, such as Horizon 2020. The 2016/2017 calls include many more opportunities to take actions on different issues surrounding obesity (such as projects related to patients, childhood obesity and sweeteners).



Michele Cecchini said that the OECD started working on obesity in 2006, recognising that it is a health and a socioeconomic issue. There is a big focus on inequalities, especially on how different events can modify these inequalities. For example, how the economic crisis has affected the rise of obesity.

He also announced that the 2016 obesity update will be released at the end of the summer. It will outline key trends and objectives, with a focus on policy intervention in communications.



John Halloran stressed the important link of obesity and social care, especially because severe obesity can result in physical and social disabilities. Together with social and health inequalities, it can even lead to discrimination.

However, in his view, social services have not addressed this yet. Education in the wider community is of key importance, along with

developing comprehensive local strategies. This includes being more ambitious by building in a more focused awareness on health into planning and delivery of services.



Dr Günter Danner gave the social insurers' point of view and said that society is drifting apart between those who are open to education and those who are not.

He also addressed that there are still many inequalities in the EU. For example, Germany has a strong focus on health education, which other countries do not have because of a lack of fund. Education is crucial in Europe, especially because the EU cannot decide what services are reimbursed or not. So it is important to invest into education and make

information available at local level.



Mischa van Eimeren said that obesity is a concern for a wide variety of stakeholders and that through collaborating in a coordinated manner many resources can be saved.

He talked about different ways of working together and how as a group, a greater political weight to advocacy activities can be achieved.

Additional comments and observations from the roundtable discussion

- **Obesity as a disease**

- There was discussion on what definition of disease for obesity to use.
- **Ellen Govers** from the European Federation of the Association of Dieticians (EFAD) said that obesity is a disease in the American point of view, and that people should be helped in self-management.
- **John Bowis** drew similarities with diabetes, saying that is a risk factor and a disease.
- **Dr Günter Danner** cautioned that to define is to limit. There needs to be careful consideration on the definition of obesity as a disease is phrased in order not to become exclusive.
- **Mischa van Eimeren** sees the recognition of obesity as a disease as having a big positive impact on diabetes and research.

- **Obesity research**

- **Carlos Oliveira** from the EASO Patient Council said that patients want to see a strong increase in research into obesity as disease.
- **Dr Maria Jose Vidal-Ragout** explained that there are many possibilities to increase research into obesity. One interesting aspect in research would be to understand the biology behind it.

- **Prevention and treatment**

- **Vicki Mooney** from the EASO Patient Council said that prevention is key.
- **Euan Woodward** stated that treatment and prevention are equally important because one does not work without the other.

- **Carlos Oliveira** said that a lot of work remains to be done in this area, with many people still waiting for treatment.
- **Ken Clare** from the EASO Patient Council said that patients should be consulted and more involved in shaping new treatments and drugs.
- **The role of employers**
 - **Dr Zofia Bajorek** said that employers have a very important role to play. It is not only about employment, but also about the social aspect due to absenteeism and presentism. There are many things to think about in the workplace, for example about what is sold in vending machines and whether lunch breaks should be used for walking
 - Employers also play a massive role with regards to stigma, they are positioned to start a culture of acceptance, for example by adapting the work place.
 - **Dr Günter Danner** said it was important to motivate employers and trade unions to cooperate here because people tend to quickly fall back into old behaviour patterns once the advice stops.
- **Social care**
 - **Dr Loukianos Gatzoulis** from the European Commission said that care services at home and at the community level needed to take into account healthy living.
 - **Beth Shaw** from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) said that they are looking at social care guidelines. They are also going to review all existing guidelines to ensure they are fit for purpose.

Conclusion and next steps

On 26 April, the [Written Declaration on recognising obesity as a disease](#) will be launched at an event at the European Parliament. Participants are encouraged to send their views on how the declaration would affect their work, especially for those who do not work directly with patients.

Participants

Name	Organisation
Dr Zofia Bajorek	The Work Foundation
John Bowis	Former MEP and Former UK Minister of Health
Camille Bullot	European Patients Forum (EPF)
Daniel Buhagiar	Assistant to MEP Dr Sant, European Parliament
Michele Cecchini	OECD
Ken Clare	EASO Patient Council
Dr Günter Danner	Permanent Representation of the German Social Security to

	the EU
Sarada Das	Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME)
Stella de Sabata	International Diabetes Federation (IDF)
Dr Nathalie Farpour-Lambert	European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO)
Dr Loukianos Gatzoulis	Unit B1, Performance of National Health Systems, DG Health and Food Safety, European Commission
Ellen Govers	European Federation of the Association of Dietitians (EFAD)
John Halloran	European Social Network
Simon Harris	Freelance
Geoffrey Henning	EuropaColon
Jakob Jakobsen	Novo Nordisk
Olalla Michelena	Make Mothers Matter (MMM)
Vicky Mooney	EASO Patient Council
Carlos Oliveira	Portuguese Organisation for Obese and Formerly Obese Patients (ADEXO)
Dr Alfred Sant	MEP (S&D, Malta)
Beth Shaw	National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE)
Magdalena Uerlich	European Public Health Association (EPHA)
Mischa van Eimeren	European Association for the Study of Diabetes (EASD)
Dr Maria-Jose Vidal-Ragout	Head of Unit, E4 Non-communicable diseases and the challenges of healthy ageing, DG Research & Innovation, European Commission
Dr Tommy Visscher	European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO)
Euan Woodward	European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO)

Observers

Name	Organisation
Sheree Bryant	European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO)
Tim Edgar	Cambre Associates
Helen Oberg	Cambre Associates
Theresa-Sophie Stiegler	Cambre Associates

Apologies

Apologies were received from the following who had originally confirmed their intent to attend:

Name	Organisation
Lars Alling	Medtronic
Rebecca Currie	Novo Nordisk
Valeria Fagone	Medtronic
Laszlo Kiss	Medtronic
Prof Hans Törnblom	United European Gastroenterologists (UEG)